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## Silencing Milo

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The decision by the Federal Government Minister for Immigration to deny provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos a visa to enter Australia is outrageous. This marks the third position the government has had on Milo.

First the Department of Home Affairs told Yiannopoulos they were planning to deny him a visa. Thanks to the advocacy of three Liberal MP's, Tim Wilson, Amanda Stoker and James Paterson, the minister rightfully overturned this decision.

However, following the terrible Christchurch terrorist attack, the government then decided to ban Milo when he described Islam as 'barbaric' and 'alien'.

The Department of Home Affairs told Yiannopoulos that it has the power to block someone's visa if there was a risk they would 'incite discord in the Australian community or in a segment of that community'. No such ban was recommended for Muslim cleric Dr Omar Abdelkafy, who just last month toured Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. Dr Abdelkafy recently described the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as comedy. Referring to a horrific terrorist attack in which eleven Australians lost their lives is certainly enough to 'incite discord in the Australian community', but why is the department and the government treating Dr Abdelkafy with kid gloves, but Milo with a permanent censure?

Technically, there is a 'risk' that any tourist visiting Australia could incite discord. This is an extremely dangerous low bar to rule upon and sets a dangerous precedent.

To renege on the decision post the Christchurch attack highlights a government that is unsure of what it believes. It is a weak and pathetic decision that diminishes the fundamental Australian value of freedom of speech.

By banning Yiannopoulos from Australia, a Liberal government has handed over a powerful heckler's veto to the extreme violent Left. This decision will empower extremists to protest and disrupt even the most palatable of right-of-centre speakers. This decision sets a terrible precedent that will haunt the Coalition for years to come.

The Left organised protests against Canadian psychologist Jordan Petersen for his Australian tour last month. If the Yiannopoulos test was applied to Peterson, he would have been denied. It might have seemed like a tick and flick decision for Immigration Minister David Coleman, but this decision goes to the fundamentals of freedom of speech in Australia.



There have been reports that one of the grounds to deny Yiannopoulos a visa is that he is anti-semitic. The provocateur sparked controversy recently when he sent a Jewish journalist \$14.88 via Paypal. These numbers are coded Nazi symbols, and he would have to have known this. This is an abhorrent thing to do and highly unsavoury.

The first question for the department to ask should have been 'has Milo said or done anything that is unlawful under Commonwealth law?' The answer is no.

In 2017, US comedian Kathy Griffin toured Australia after controversially brandishing a bloodied severed head of Donald Trump, the president of our closest strategic ally. It seems awfully risky that she could have and did 'incite discord' in the Australian community. Where is the Department of Home Affairs' consistency? Kathy Griffin should be allowed to tour Australia; she is not a threat to anyone's safety, nor is what she did unlawful.

Given that the department and the minister have made the decision to ban a person who has engaged in no unlawful activity, but purely on the basis of his notoriety, what is to stop a future Labor government from banning speakers who question the science of climate change, promote a traditional view on marriage, or promote free market economics even?

Visa bans on speech grounds should worry both sides of politics. If a Liberal government deems it acceptable to ban a visa for a right-wing provocateur on speech grounds, what is to stop them from banning left wing activists who hold radical views on climate change, a contrary view on border protection or even socialism?

Recently the federal government made a decision to ban conspiracy theorist and Holocaust denier David Icke from Australia. What Mr Icke has said in the past is far more offensive and outlandish than Milo, but again, none of what he has said is unlawful to say in Australia.

Australians do not need the government to save them from offensive speech.

If someone tours Australia to spout supposedly offensive views, then their views should be challenged and tested, rather than denying that person a platform in the first place. If views are offensive, the community should call them out and be given the chance to critique their viewpoint. Attacks on our freedom won't be solved by more attacks on freedom.

The winners out of this decision are the fringe-dwelling left-wing activists who have aggressively protested recent tours, trying to physically prevent others from attending them. By making this decision, the Minister may as well have been standing in protest with the fringe-dwellers.

Milo Yiannopoulos has been kept out of the country purely for his opinions. Not for expressing them, just for having them; this is an outrageous step.

In 2012 in a speech to the Institute of Public Affairs, when opposing draconian media laws and promising to repeal Section 18C, then opposition leader Tony Abbott said of the Liberal party: 'Essentially, we are the freedom party. We stand for the freedoms which Australians have a right



to expect and which governments have a duty to uphold. We stand for freedom and will be freedom's bulwark against the encroachments of an unworthy and dishonourable government.'

The Liberal party can no longer claim to be the freedom party. An election might be just around the corner, but freedom of speech is more important than election cycles. John Stuart Mill argued that the freedom to speak was really the freedom to hear. To silence someone is to deny others the permission to listen and to test their views against others, even if the end result is the rejection of those different ideas.

Something for Prime Minister Scott Morrison and minister David Coleman to think about.

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